



## Cousteau Kicks off Seagrass Celebration

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Mark Klingbeil, representative on the Seagrass Outreach Partnership for World Wide Sportsman, listens to Jean-Michel Cousteau speak about seagrass protection during the Seagrass Festival held at World Wide Sportsman in Islamorada.

World-renowned ocean explorer and film-maker Jean-Michel Cousteau offered a few poignant words about the importance of protecting seagrass communities during the Seagrass Awareness Month Celebration at World Wide Sportsman in Islamorada. “The health of the beloved coral reefs of the Florida Keys depends upon the health of its seagrass habitat,” said Cousteau. “Without the quiet beauty of the seagrass meadows, the splendors of the coral reef could not thrive. Like everything on our planet, the two are directly connected”.

Cousteau, President of Ocean Futures Society and National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Board Member, attended the Seagrass Festival in March during a visit to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

“We were truly honored to have Mr. Cousteau join us in our effort to increase awareness about boating impacts to seagrass communities,” stated Mary Tagliareni, Education Coordinator for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Seagrass Outreach Partnership Chair.

“This is the first time we’ve held an event entirely dedicated to educating people about how to prevent boating injuries to this valuable resource. We are very fortunate to have World Wide Sportsman as a Seagrass Outreach Partner this year,” added Tagliareni. “World Wide Sportsman was a perfect location to reach out to both visitors and Keys residents about this issue.”

Under the direction of General Manager George Hommell, Jr. (one of NOAA’s Environmental Heroes for 2002, see page 6), World Wide Sportsman joined the Seagrass Outreach Partnership last year to help spread the word about preventing damage to seagrass, an important coastal habitat for maintaining healthy fish populations. The Seagrass Outreach Partnership is an interagency and community partnership that is dedicated to preventing damage to seagrass communities.

Visitors attending the event enjoyed a variety of activities conducted by Seagrass Outreach Partners. Captain Mike Ehlers from the Florida Keys Guides Association demonstrated casting techniques for both young and not-so-young anglers. Boaters were able to practice their navigational skills and learn about channel marking at the station developed by Monroe County Biologist Rich Jones and Sanctuary Lower Region Manager Fritz Wettstein. Visitors were also able to closely examine some of the marine creatures that live in the seagrass community in the aquaria set up by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Florida Marine Research Institute.



At the Seagrass Festival, Steve Werndli and Sean Meehan discuss the techniques used by the Sanctuary’s damage assessment team in determining the amount of damage done to seagrass by boats during groundings.

*Note: This article first appeared in the Summer 2002 issue of **Sounding Line**, the newsletter of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. For more information, visit: [floridakeys.noaa.gov](http://floridakeys.noaa.gov).*